

## Government finishes exercise on “restriction-testing declaration” and compulsory testing notice in respect of specified “restricted area” in Jordan

The Government on January 23 exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration), by which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Jordan (i.e. an area bounded by Woosung Street to its east, Nanking Street to its south, Battery Street to its west and Kansu Street to its north.) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing in accordance with the arrangement by the Government. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government originally aimed at finishing this exercise within about 48 hours, in order to achieve the goal of zero cases in the district with concerted efforts. With the co-operation of the residents under restriction, working staff from relevant Government departments and the testing agencies, the exercise finished earlier at midnight of January 25.

Outbreaks in the "restricted area" remained severe. From January 1 to 20, 2021, a total of 162 positive cases were recorded within the "Jordan specified area", involving 56 buildings. Residents in the district were worried and some of them have misunderstanding towards the epidemic situation. Moreover, in the past few days, the ratio of the sewage samples found in the buildings located in the "restricted area" being constantly tested positive was higher than that of the other areas of the "Jordan specified area", which implies possibly infected persons might be present at those places. At the same time, the Government is aware that those buildings in the "restricted area" are relatively old and lack of maintenance, and many are "three-nil buildings". Sub-divided units are common and the infection risk in the community is quite high. After risk assessment, the Government thinks it is necessary to issue a restriction-testing declaration for the "restricted area" to break the transmission chain in the district and dispel the worries of residents in the district.

The Government set up 51 temporary specimen collection stations in the "restricted area" on January 23 and requested persons subject to compulsory testing to collect combined nasal and throat swabs samples at the stations and undergo COVID-19 virus test.

In this exercise, the Government mobilised over 3 000 staff from 16 departments, including 1 600 officers from disciplined services, to arrange

implementation of the declaration and notice.

The Government implemented this compulsory testing with a human-centred approach. In order to ensure the arrangement of three meals for persons subject to compulsory testing, the Government provided many kinds of food for them, including 6 500 food packs (with instant noodles, pasta, canned food, etc), 13 000 cup noodles, 9 100 soup packs (pork or chicken), about 15 600 fruits, 9 000 cakes, 9 000 packs of soy milk, 8 000 cans of pork ham or tuna fish with easy-to-open covers, 4 000 cans of corn, 2 000 packs of instant noodles and 6 500 packs of bread. One box of masks, some cleaning tools, hand sanitizers, etc. were also provided to persons subject to compulsory testing to help them fight against the virus.

Taking into consideration that there are a number of ethnic minorities in the "restricted area", the Home Affairs Department (HAD) has arranged some 50 working staff who can speak Nepali, Urdu and Hindi to assist ethnic minorities to undergo testing in specimen collection stations and help explain the arrangement on the "restriction-testing declaration". In order to assist ethnic minorities in understanding the content of the declaration, the HAD also produced leaflets in three ethnic minority languages (Nepali, Urdu and Hindi) which are more popular for distribution to persons in the "restricted area". Content of the leaflet are also recorded as videos in the three languages. In addition, the HAD requested the eight support service centres for ethnic minorities to upload relevant information to their websites and Facebook pages, as well as to deliver the message to their service users via WhatsApp. The HAD has also set up a dedicated hotline for ethnic minorities restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The hotline has handled around 240 enquiries in total on testing arrangement, testing area and food arrangement, etc.

The Government thanks persons subject to compulsory testing for their support and understanding. With everyone's co-operation and efforts, coupling with the tireless efforts from the testing contractors, residents have been informed about their testing results by SMS. Taking into account of the above situation, the "restriction-testing declaration" has been revoked in accordance with Cap 599J (see attachment). The Government also announced that the exercise was ended at midnight on January 25, so as to allow residents enough time to get prepared to start getting to work in the morning.

During the effective period of the declaration, about 7 000 persons underwent testing. As at midnight of January 25, 13 confirmed cases were found. Persons with confirmed cases and their relevant close contacts have been transferred to quarantine centres or hospitalised for treatment.

Besides, the Government visited 3 650 households, of which around 473 of them did not answer the door. Among these households, some live in buildings in the "restricted area" which have not been evacuated. Households with confirmed cases or undergoing quarantine may also be included. Some units are possibly vacant. The Government does not have detailed information in this respect and will take measures to follow-up and trace households in the district which have not responded.

Although the time limit of compulsory testing specified in the declaration has expired at midnight on January 24, after the home visits and testing on January 23, the Government has assigned a number of staff members on January 24 to request those in premises within the "restricted area" who had not undergone testing to do so as soon as possible. After the staff members followed up with the households one by one, we discovered about 110 people who had not undergone testing before the time limit and they were arranged to take the test immediately.

The Government understands that residents in the district are worried and anxious because of the increase in confirmed cases in recent days. Under the epidemic, businesses in the area have been hit hard and brought to a standstill. Residents' livelihood are also affected. The Government hopes this temporary inconvenience will completely cut the local transmission chains in the district and ease residents' worries and fear, so that they will regain confidence in resuming social and business activities in the area, and return to a normal life.

The Government expresses its gratitude to the persons subject to compulsory testing again for their support and understanding, and their full co-operation during this period in undergoing testing and waiting for the result at home. The Government also thanks all the participating Government staff and the testing agencies for their hard work, enabling the smooth implementation of the declaration within a short period of time, minimising inconvenience brought to the persons subject to compulsory testing.

The Government as a whole is united in fighting against the virus despite all the difficulties by providing testing for all the residents in the district within a short period of time, in the hope of achieving zero cases in the district.

The Government will strictly follow up on enforcement implementation. The Government also reminds persons who had been present in the "restricted area" for more than two hours in the past 14 days, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, to comply with the compulsory testing notices and undergo testing at testing centres as soon as possible for the sake of themselves and that of the others. Undergoing testing is a responsible act for oneself, his/her family and the community. Any person who breaches the "restriction-testing declaration" commits an offence and may be liable to a fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months.